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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS

Joint statement submitted by the International Alliance of Women, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, the International Social Security Association, Soroptimist International, Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status, (category I), the Baha'i International Community, Caritas Internationalis, Emmaus International, the International Abolitionist Federation, the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, the International Federation of Social Workers, the International Federation Terre des hommes, the International Federation of University Women, the International Movement for Fraternal Union among Races and Peoples, Pax Christi International, Pax Romana, the Salvation Army, the World Federation of Methodist Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status, (category II), InterAid International, the International Association of Charities, non-governmental organizations on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[21 March 1996]

International Year for the eradication of poverty

"People living in extreme poverty can teach us better than others, because of their particular situation, the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights." 1/

"It is estimated that more than 1,000 million people live in poverty and that 60 per cent of them live in extreme poverty, which represents 20 per cent of the world population." 2/

"In the international classification of diseases established by WHO, the most pitiless killer and the most effective, which is also the main cause of suffering in the world, goes under the code name of Z 59.9: the name for extreme poverty." 3/

"The poor remain poor mainly because they are underrepresented in political and economic discussions." 4/

1/ Father Joseph Wresinski, Commission on Human Rights, forty-third session, February 1987.

2/ Second interim report on human rights and extreme poverty by Leandro Despouy (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/15, para. 24).

3/ World Health Report, 1995, "Bridging the gaps", p. 1.

4/ The State of the World's Children, 1995, UNICEF, p. 53.

1. The NGOs signing this statement wish to repeat that the fight against poverty and extreme poverty has been from the beginning one of the objectives of the United Nations, based on human rights and on the dignity and value of each human being.

2. The San Francisco Charter underlines that "We, the people of the United Nations, determined to proclaim once again our faith in the fundamental rights of man, ... have decided to coordinate our efforts ... in order to encourage social progress and bring out better life conditions with greater freedom."

3. The International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, aim at ensuring that all human beings live in conditions enabling them to enjoy all human rights. This appears completely linked to the advent of a world free from poverty: "Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of a free human being enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby every one may enjoy his civil and political rights as well as his economic, social and cultural rights". These treaties provide a framework for policies aimed at eliminating extreme poverty, which must be based on human rights.

4. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, in 1993, again clearly stated the link between the promotion of Human Rights and the fight against poverty. For Vienna, successfully fighting extreme poverty necessitates a better understanding of the phenomenon and requires associating the poorest in the fight against extreme poverty and the promotion of human rights: "The World Conference affirms that extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of human dignity and that urgent steps are necessary to achieve better knowledge of extreme poverty and its causes, including those related to the problem of development, in order to promote the human rights of the poorest, and to put an end to extreme poverty and social exclusion and to promote the enjoyment of the fruits of social progress. It is essential for States to foster participation of the poorest people in the decision-making process of the community in which they live, the promotion of human rights and efforts to combat extreme poverty." (Vienna Declaration, para. 25). The World Conference therefore defines more precisely and gives a clearer framework for the fight against extreme poverty.

5. The NGOs signing this statement welcome the fact that in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action (1995), more concrete commitments appear in order to implement policies and strategies to fight poverty and extreme poverty:

> "We gather here to commit ourselves, our Governments and our nations to enhancing social development throughout the world so that all men and women, especially those living in poverty, may exercise the rights, utilize the resources and share the responsibilities that enable them to lead satisfying lives and contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities and humankind".
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> "We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation,

as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. To this end, ... we will ... formulate or strengthen, as a matter of urgency, and preferably by the year 1996, the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, national policies and strategies geared to substantially reducing overall poverty in the shortest possible time, reducing inequalities and eradicating absolute poverty by a target date to be specified by each country in its national context."

"Governments should give greater focus to public efforts to eradicate absolute poverty and to reduce overall poverty substantially by ... identifying the lifehood systems, survival strategies and self-help organizations of people living in poverty and working with such organizations to develop programmes for combating poverty that build on their efforts, ensuring the full participation of the people concerned and responding to their actual needs."

"People living in poverty and their organizations should be empowered by:

"(a) Involving them fully in the setting of targets and in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of national strategies and programmes for poverty eradication;

...

"(c) Ensuring that policies and programmes affecting people living in poverty respect their dignity and culture and make full use of their knowledge, skills and resourcefulness;

...

"(e) Encouraging and assisting people living in poverty to organize so that their representatives can participate in economic and social policy-making ..."

6. Policies designed to eliminate extreme poverty must be based on the efforts and knowledge of the very poor, who must be able to participate not only in the improvement of their life conditions but must also be associated as partners in the elaboration, realization, follow-up and evaluation of policies fighting extreme poverty; they must also be able to contribute to humanity's well-being and the promotion of human rights. This partnership with the poorest makes it necessary for them to be able to group themselves in associations and for their representatives to be associated in policies aimed at fighting poverty and promoting human rights. Finally, policies aimed at the eradication of poverty must be global and concern themselves with eliminating extreme poverty as a priority.

7. The NGOs signing this statement want to stress that:

(a) The texts cited above show that the eradication of poverty requires global policies aimed at implementing the totality of the human rights achieved through a better knowledge of extreme poverty and in partnership with the poorest themselves;

(b) To implement such policies successfully requires first of all reaching the poorest and enabling them to be partners. To do this, it is necessary:

(i) To find out where they live, for they are very often people living in distant places, little known, most invisible;

(ii) To meet them, to establish trust, which will enable them to become not only beneficiaries, but participants in a project. The NGOs working in the field are in a position to act in such a way as to enable them to gather a great deal of knowledge, with the very poor, about extreme poverty and to take steps that enable them to establish a first partnership;

(iii) As is shown through the experience of NGOs in the field, a long-term investment enables them in time to discover very poor individuals and families and create the conditions necessary to establish a partnership between the poorest and other members of society;

(iv) As is already shown through the experience of NGOs in the field, it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that it will take the poorest a long apprenticeship to be able to achieve partnership and that it is essential for those dealing with them to change their approach to the poorest so that they can recognize them as partners.

8. This is why the NGOs signing this statement:

(a) Commit themselves to be actors in this new approach to the poorest, an approach that recognizes them as being the same as other human beings, entitled to rights derived from the inherent dignity of all human beings;

(b) Commit themselves to go on promoting and supporting every effort aimed at reaching the poorest, to improve their knowledge of what extreme poverty is and to create conditions enabling real partnership with the poorest for the promotion of human rights and the struggle against extreme poverty;

(c) Await with much interest the publication of two studies undertaken in consultation with the poorest and with organizations working with them:

(i) The study undertaken by Mr. Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, on human rights and extreme poverty;

(ii) The exploratory work undertaken by UNICEF: "Reaching the poorest".

9. The NGOs signing this statement ask the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as the various intergovernmental organizations and Governments:

(a) To draft in this International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, global policies for the eradication of poverty that:

(i) Aim, as a priority, to eradicate poverty in its most extreme forms;

(ii) Adopt as their objective the complete implementation of human rights for all, including the poorest, something which is necessary for freeing human beings from extreme poverty and enabling them to live in dignity;

(iii) Base themselves on the findings of the two studies mentioned above, conducted in consultation with the poorest and with organizations working with them;

(iv) Have the will to reach the poorest;

(v) Base themselves on the efforts, experience and thinking of the poorest and recognize them as indispensable partners;

(vi) Influence the elaboration, implementation and budgeting of social and economic development policies;

(b) In the definition of absolute poverty, required from each State in 1996 by the Declaration and Programme of Action of Copenhagen, notably to take into account, among other things;

(i) The effective enjoyment of human rights by the poorest and the ability to carry out their social, civic and family responsibilities;

(ii) The link existing between poverty and extreme poverty.

(c) The studies on human rights and extreme poverty as well as the exploratory work entitled "Reaching the poorest" be published and distributed as widely as possible.

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